

## A Conversation Starter around Loss, Grief, and Bereavement

**Everyone experiences personal loss at some point in their lives. Yet this subject remains taboo in our society.**

On the evening of Thursday 17<sup>th</sup> May 2018, as part of *Dying Matters* week, the Cicely Saunders Institute and Department of Adult Nursing at King's College London held their second 'conversation starter event'. The team sought to address this taboo, and encourage attendees to talk about their experiences of loss, grief and bereavement.

After browsing a display of research and resources from the Faculty and local bereavement organisations, over 100 attendees (mostly healthcare professionals and members of the public) entered the Greenwood Theatre, London. Following an introduction from Baroness Ilora Finlay, Haylo Theatre performed 'Sisters, Seagulls and Send Offs'.

The play explores two sisters' reactions to the death of their father, in a performance described by one attendee as "*brilliant...* *highlighting common issues around this difficult subject*".

This prompted thoughtful discussion from our expert panel, featuring: Steve Marshall (palliative care social worker, King's College Hospital), Debbie Kerslake (retired chair of CRUSE), Lucinda Jarrett (artistic director of Rosetta Life), and Linda Magistris (founder of the Good Grief Trust), and members of the audience. Many commented on how the performance resonated with their personal experiences, the role of arts in starting these discussions, and the importance of being willing to simply listen to others.



## Talking about loss, grief, & bereavement ...**before** the event...

nt...  
words accessible stories drama others engage initiate little help interesting pool  
death still will okay  
thank sadness connect much  
community necessary bereavement great can  
feeling issues even easier needs good grief  
human listening feelings process event need lot  
loss essential really time support just maybe  
talking enough especially something sometimes people gain  
always individual around hear hard talk appropriate

...and **after** the event

Attendees were asked how they felt talking about bereavement before and after the event, and 75 people responded. Many felt the event had shifted their views on these difficult conversations:

***“well worth doing and this evening will encourage me to be more proactive”***

*“easier and I feel more equipped, sometimes being there is powerful enough”*

Others didn't express this change, but appreciated the affirmation that others were experiencing similar things:

*"still very difficult but I leave feeling how universal and shared this sensation is"*

***"still difficult but it is heartening to hear that we're not alone in finding it hard to talk"***

Overall, 90% of attendees agreed or strongly agreed that they enjoyed the event, and that they would come to another ‘conversation starter’ event in the future.

In the reception area we also gave people an opportunity to suggest what research they would like to see about grief and bereavement. This included:

*"The first few moments (up to the first week) of bereavement"*

### ***“Childhood bereavement”***

***“End of life care of those living with dementia, especially identifying pain”***

Several people also suggested research on bereavement in a multicultural society should be a priority. Others emphasized the importance of sharing existing research as widely as possible.



If you would like to find out more, please contact the team at [csi.ppi@kcl.ac.uk](mailto:csi.ppi@kcl.ac.uk).

To hear about future events, follow us on twitter at @CSI\_KCL